

# LUXURY

## ULTIMATE INDULGENCE

The best experiences money can buy

### PLUS

- Cruising around the Med in style
- The A-list hotels & top concierges
- Paradise island in the Indian Ocean
- Fine restaurants, spas & more...



## TRAVELLERS' TALES

## DREAM ISLAND



North Island, Seychelles

IMAGE: NORTH ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

**For complete escapism and ultimate luxury, few destinations beat North Island in the Seychelles, says Leo Bear**

EVER SINCE I was a young girl, I've been in love with the idea of a desert island paradise. I've been exploring the planet for 15 years searching for this exotic retreat, and guess what? I've found it.

Floating in the middle of the Indian Ocean among the Seychelles archipelago, North Island is a tiny isle, 15 minutes from Mahe by helicopter. Here, the basic concept of a hotel goes out the window. There are no menus, no breakfast times, no cocktail lists, no dress codes, nothing to sign for — it's just pure, unadulterated island living with a substantial pricetag attached.

### VILLA LIFE

The villas are the biggest I've seen anywhere (450sq metres), and the prettiest. Sculpted from indigenous *takamaka* trees, every table, lamp and shutter has been handcrafted by Seychellois craftsmen. Strings of coral act as sunscreens and mother of pearl curtains divide the outdoor bathrooms.

Each villa has a large garden and a study-cum-home cinema. I was offered a 'movie night' one evening and strolled in to find soft lighting, cashmere throws, and bowls of popcorn and pick 'n' mix sweets. Never had watching a film felt so decadent.

Villas come with butler service, of course. One morning, I wanted to test my butler's knowledge so I asked him whether the chefs source any of their ingredients from the island itself. With a cheeky grin, he led me to an area of coconut trees and introduced me to a chainsaw-wielding Rastafarian. Next thing I knew, boom, a coconut tree was felled. After much hacking and tearing at husks, all was revealed: a waxy 3ft-long heart of palm. This was whisked over to the lodge and sliced into a 'millionaire's salad'. Just a splash of lime, some ginger and chilli, were the only additions required.

### VISUAL WONDERLAND

Dense and tropical, with verdant peaks and coconut-strewn plateaus, it's hard to believe that when Wilderness Safaris bought the island back in 1997, it was overgrown and teeming with rats. It was the task of

biologist Linda Vanherck to rid the island of any flora and fauna that didn't belong there, and restore it to its original natural glory. With few records to go by, she had to dig out clues from old ship journals dating back to 1800. Indigenous species were reintroduced, such as the giant Aldabra tortoises which now roam the island, nibbling on the grass around guests' plunge pools. Other native species include blue pigeons, white-eyes, black mud terrapins, vanilla orchids and coco de mer — all flown in by helicopter or shipped over Ark-style.

North's unrivalled privacy (you can hire it in its entirety) has made it popular with celebrities. It came as no surprise to industry insiders when Kate and Will were spotted honeymooning here. Another draw is the diving. The dive centre, in a restored coral building, is open 24/7. You can go out night or day to see sheep crabs, nurse sharks, eagle rays and hawksbill turtles going about their business — it's diving on demand. My favourite site was Sprat City, just 10 minutes from my villa. Upon surfacing, a plate of world-class sashimi was waiting for me.

It's these classy touches that make North Island special. But best of all, you're given independence here. Upon arrival, every guest is handed the keys to their own electric buggy so they can explore the grounds at will.

Before bidding farewell to the island, I zipped over to West Beach. With only a hamper of grilled prawns and bottle of Sauvignon Blanc for company, I had the whole beach to myself. Gazing out to sea with my feet in the sand, I thought to myself, 'I've found it at last. Paradise.' And it was just as I had imagined.

### SAMPLE

■ **ITC CLASSICS** has five nights from £10,839 per person, based on two adults sharing a Presidential Villa, on an all-inclusive basis including return flights with Etihad from Heathrow and helicopter transfers. T: 01244 355 527. [www.itcclassics.co.uk](http://www.itcclassics.co.uk)